

Trinity 12, 2018: St Thomas on The Bourne,

So, a quiz.

I am going to read out some lyrics and you have to tell me the name of the song... and the singers, and complete the lyric...

Friday night and the lights are low

Looking out for a place to go

Where they play the right music

Getting in the swing

You come to look for a king

Anybody could be that guy

Night is young and the music's high

With a bit of rock music

Everything is fine

You're in the mood for a dance

And when you get the chance

You are[the dancing queen]

Young and sweet

Only seventeen

Dancing queen

Feel the beat from the tambourine, oh yeah

You can dance

You can jive

Having the time of your life

Ooh, see that girl

Watch that scene

Dig in the dancing queen...

Abba 1976. Agneta, Bjorn, Benni and Aana-Frid...

And now I suspect that something fairly miraculous is happening. The words have triggered in our memories the sounds, the harmonies, the music... The words without the music are pretty banal but add the music and the whole thing comes alive... and maybe you even want to dance.

Now travel back in time for about 2000 years and listen again to our first Reading set for today

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, we don't know what the words of those hymns were that were sung by our Christian forebears...nor do we know the music, tho' if you are interested, Google 'Ancient Greek Music', and you will find music which sounds much more eastern than western, more like a muezzin than Mozart... it was the kind of music that would have been played in Ephesus at the time the Epistle was written to the young congregation there.... and, whilst we are thinking of hymns...

...we don't know which hymn it was that the disciples sang after the Last Supper and before they went to the Mount of Olives...but according to Matthew's Gospel they certainly sang one...Let me remind you: Matthew 26, 30.

But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives... It's a haunting image, after the Last Supper when the mood must have been one of tension and apprehension, 11 men plus Jesus stood up in a small room, and sang...

Back to the text, and a particular phrase which caught my attention when I began to think about this sermon. Let me read it to you again;

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

What does 'songs from the Spirit' mean?

Here's a possibility...there is a close and intimate relationship between music and maths. As Pythagoras once said: "*there is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres.*" Or, if you want that put more poetically, that concept of a direct relationship between music and the underlying beauties and mathematical patterns of the universe was phrased by Edward Elgar as a question: 'The trees are singing my music, or have I sung theirs?' In fact, when Elgar was a young boy he would sit by the side of a river with a lined notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other, as he explained to his later biographer, he was trying to write down what the reeds were singing...

Both Pythagoras and Edward Elgar seem to be suggesting that there is a direct and profound relationship between music and the way the universe itself is constructed. It's as though composers tap into the hidden harmonies of the Universe and bring those harmonies to our attention... Let me put it another way: when you hear a great piece of music does it not seem as if the music has always existed somewhere out there, but now the composer has revealed it to us...Doesn't Karl Jenkin's

haunting *Benedictus*, for instance, have that quality? Can you imagine a time when those harmonies never existed? Haven't they always been there?

So perhaps we are getting closer to the meaning of the words in the Epistle about 'songs from the Spirit'...

Let me try to express it like this: If the Universe was brought into being by God, and if God continues to hold it in being, is it not possible that the harmonies of music reveal something of the very being of God? Perhaps the entire Universe is itself in truth a Song from the Spirit... and so when we are exhorted by the writer of the letter to the Ephesians to sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord, we are being encouraged to allow ourselves to be in touch with the harmonies of the universe, to listen in to the harmonies of God.

The music of heaven is the music of our souls... and the music of our souls is the music of heaven..., and we humans really are, as Abba put it, Dancing Kings and Dancing Queens...